5

Classical Apologetics:

A Reasonable Faith

In the previous chapter we surveyed a number of apologists working in the classical tradition. Although they vary among themselves especially on the extent to which they use deductive or inductive arguments to formulate their apologetic as a whole, all emphasize the importance of showing the theistic worldview to be reasonable in order to present the evidences for the facts of Christianity effectively to nontheists. It is this methodological principle, however differently understood and applied, that typifies the classical apologetic approach. In this chapter we consider how this principle is related to various crucial areas of human knowledge that have an important bearing on the truth claims of Christianity.

Rational Tests for Determining Truth

In the classical approach, there is no substantive conflict between faith and reason. The Christian worldview is a reasonable faith, a step into the light of reason and truth rather than a leap into the darkness of irrationality and subjectivity. To show this reasonableness, classical apologists stress the need to compare and evaluate conflicting worldviews by means of certain epistemological criteria, chief among which is logical consistency or rationality. This does *not* mean that classical apologists are pure rationalists in their epistemology. All would be quick to

acknowledge that **rationalism** per se (according to which, reason is the sole test of truth) is an inadequate approach to religious knowledge. Rationalism wrongly elevates human reason to the level of an ultimate arbiter of truth. Moreover, because God transcends the universe, the human mind cannot arrive on its own at substantive knowledge about God.

Geisler's treatment of rationalism is representative of the classical approach. The strength of rationalism, he argues, lies in its stress on the inescapability of the law of noncontradiction, its recognition of the *a priori* categories of knowledge, and its emphasis on the intelligibility of reality. In spite of these positive features, Geisler maintains that the standard forms of rationalism are deficient because they fail to demonstrate that their first principles are rationally necessary. Logic is an indispensable and excellent negative test for truth—it is very useful in disproving truth claims—but it is insufficient alone as a positive test for truth.[1] This does *not* mean that Geisler does not view logic as a test for truth, but only that logic cannot discover truth *alone*. He explains why he is not a rationalist as follows:

> A rationalist tries to *determine* all truth by human reason. A reasonable Christian merely uses reason to *discover* truth that God has revealed, either by general revelation or by special revelation in the Bible."[2]

Warfield argued that rationalism erred in insisting that every doctrine of Christianity had to be tested and proved before the bar of reason before any of it could be believed. Reason may examine the truth claims of the Christian religion as a whole, he agreed, but it would be unreasonable to deny that some truths about the transcendent God and his relationship to mankind might be beyond our capacity to prove rationally.

> It certainly is not the business of apologetics to take up each tenet of Christianity in turn and seek to establish its truth by a direct appeal to reason. Any attempt to do this, no

> matter on what philosophical basis the work of demonstration be begun or by what methods it be pursued, would transfer us at once into the atmosphere and betray us into the devious devices of the old vulgar rationalism, the primary fault of which was that it asked for a direct rational demonstration of the truth of each Christian teaching in turn.[3]

Such comments about the limits of rationality alone should not obscure the primary role that logic or reason plays in classical apologetics. According to Geisler, logic "is the basis of all thought about God."[4] In a statement he was to make repeatedly in his writings, Warfield asserted that "we believe in Christ because it is rational to believe in Him, not even though it be irrational."[5] Indeed, Warfield contends, there cannot be true faith that is not rationally grounded in evidence. The purpose of apologetics is to elucidate these rational grounds. This does not at all mean that people must be able to demonstrate the truth of Christianity in order to be Christians. In fact, people may have faith and be completely at a loss to analyze or explain the grounds of their faith. Yet such rationally explicable grounds must exist, according to classical apologists. Warfield explains:

> A man recognizes on sight the face of his friend, or his own handwriting. Ask him how he knows this face to be that of his friend, or this handwriting to be his own, and he is dumb, or, seeking to reply, babbles nonsense. Yet his recognition rests on solid grounds, though he lacks analytical skill to isolate and state these solid grounds. We believe in God and freedom and immortality on good grounds, though we may not be able satisfactorily to analyze these grounds. No true conviction exists without adequate rational grounding in evidence. . . . The Christian's conviction of the deity of his Lord does not depend for its soundness on the Christian's ability convincingly to state the grounds of his conviction.[6]

Although classical apologists do not think the truth of Christianity depends on the strength of their arguments, this does not mean they are dubious about the rational validity of those arguments. Geisler's own approach, though not a thoroughgoing rationalism, uses arguments based on a dual test for truth that is largely rationalist. Unaffirmability is used as the negative test, while undeniability is the positive test. A statement is unaffirmable if the act of affirming it actually contradicts it ("I cannot utter a single sentence in English"). A statement is undeniable if it is true by definition ("A triangle has three sides") or if the act of denying it actually affirms it ("It is not true that I exist").[7] According to Geisler, the main problem with a purely rationalistic argument like the ontological argument (which reasons from the idea of an unsurpassably great being to the existence of that being, i.e., God) is that it assumes that something exists:

> Of course, if something exists, then the ontological argument takes on new strength; for if something exists it is possible that something necessarily exists. But the point here is that there is no purely logical way to eliminate the "if." I know undeniably but not with logical necessity that I exist.[8]

In his main argument for God's existence—a form of the cosmological argument—Geisler's only empirically grounded premise is that some changing being or beings exist. The rest of the argument proceeds rationally to reach the conclusion that God exists.[9] An argument of this sort is highly rationalistic even though it is not an exercise in pure rationalism.

The rational test of unaffirmability is frequently used in classical apologetics, in particular to show that certain non-Christian philosophies are untenable. One such philosophy is the tradition of relativism and postmodernism that emerged as a potent cultural force in the last decade of the twentieth century. **Relativism** is the belief that statements of fact or value are true

from some perspectives but not from others; in short, all truth is relative. This has been a dominant view of knowledge in much Eastern religion and philosophy, as well as in the New Age movement. Advocates of these belief systems find nothing troubling about affirming flatly contradictory claims. **Postmodernism** is a cultural movement that has applied relativistic thinking in various fields of thought, including architecture, law, ethics, literature, the arts, philosophy, and even theology. Classical apologists firmly resist relativism in all its forms as a logically incoherent view of knowledge. They point out that a statement of relativism such as "Every point of view is only partial" is self-defeating because, if expressing only a partial point of view, it is not true for all points of view—which means that some points of view are total, not partial. If the statement is said to express the total truth, of course, then the statement becomes an example of the kind of knowledge the statement itself asserts cannot be had.[10]

While classical apologists use arguments that, if sound, yield certain conclusions, they are often content to conclude simply that belief in God, as well as in Christ, is reasonable. For example, C. S. Lewis argues that at a minimum Christianity must have some rational plausibility; it is not a religion of indifference to reason or evidence. "We know, in fact, that believers are not cut off from unbelievers by any portentous inferiority of intelligence or any perverse refusal to think. Many of them have been people of powerful minds. Many of them have been scientists. We may suppose them to have been mistaken, but we must suppose that their error was at least plausible."[11]

Lewis thinks "there is evidence both for and against the Christian propositions which fully rational minds, working honestly, can assess differently. . . . There is no reason to suppose stark unreason on either side. We need only suppose error. One side has estimated the evidence wrongly. And even so, the mistake cannot be supposed to be of a flagrant nature; otherwise the

debate would not continue."[12] Likewise, William Lane Craig has explained that he does not attempt to prove that it is necessarily *irrational* to disbelieve in the Resurrection, but that the Resurrection is the *best* explanation of the known facts.[13]

Craig's view of the relationship between faith and reason merits closer consideration. He has set forth that view most fully in the first chapter of his textbook on apologetics, *Reasonable Faith*. He begins by surveying the thought of such thinkers as Augustine, Aquinas, John Locke, Wolfhart Pannenberg, and Alvin Plantinga. He then develops his own answer to the question, "How do I know Christianity is true?" The key to answering this question, he says, is "to distinguish between *knowing* Christianity to be true and *showing* Christianity to be true" (31).[14] He discusses these two issues separately.

First, Craig suggests that "the way we know Christianity to be true is by the self-authenticating witness of God's Holy Spirit" (31). A person who has this witness from the Holy Spirit "does not need supplementary arguments or evidences" to know that he is having that experience, because it is a direct experience of God and not merely the basis of an argument about God (32). Craig finds this doctrine clearly taught in the New Testament (32-34). "For the believer, God is not the conclusion of a syllogism; he is the living God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob dwelling within us" (34). The unbeliever's problem is not a lack of arguments or evidence but resistance to this witness of the Spirit (35-36). Given this ultimate, grounding role of the witness of the Spirit in our knowledge of the truth of Christianity, "the only role left for argument and evidence to play is a subsidiary role. . . . A person who knows Christianity is true on the basis of the witness of the Spirit may also have a sound apologetic which reinforces or confirms for him the Spirit's witness, but it does not serve as the basis of his belief" (36). To

make apologetic argument the basis of faith "would consign most believers to irrationality" and let people who had not been given good arguments for Christianity off the hook (37).

When it comes to *showing* that Christianity is true, the roles of the Holy Spirit's witness and of argument "are somewhat reversed." Showing that Christianity is true involves presenting "sound and persuasive arguments for Christian truth claims" (38). These arguments may be either deductive or inductive, but in both forms of reasoning "logic and fact are the keys to showing soundly that a conclusion is true" (40). A truth claim that "is logically consistent and fits all the facts known in our experience" passes the test for truth known as *systematic consistency*.[15] This test does not "guarantee the truth of a world view"; it merely shows that worldview to be probably true. This does not undermine the absolute commitment required in faith because while we can only *show* Christianity to be probably true by argument, we can *know* Christianity to be true with complete assurance by the Spirit's witness (40). Moreover, the Holy Spirit can and does use rational argumentation as means through which he brings people to faith (46-47).

Craig recognizes that many people today who espouse some form of Eastern religion or New Age teaching will dismiss his appeal to logical consistency. These belief systems often *encourage* people to hold contradictory ideas together. Craig finds such ideas "frankly crazy and unintelligible" (41). The claim that logic and other self-evident principles are not universally true "seems to be both self-refuting and arbitrary." He asks us to consider the claim that "God cannot be described by propositions governed by the Law of Contradiction." If this statement is true, then it itself expresses a proposition that is not governed by the law of contradiction. But that means that its contrary is also true: God can be described by propositions governed by the law of contradiction (42). Craig then shows that the same problem applies to postmodernism. His own

view that the truth about Christ is known ultimately by the witness of the Spirit and not by rationalism might be described as a kind of postmodern view of knowledge. But postmodernists per se claim "that there is no objective truth about reality" (43), and such a claim is again "self-refuting and arbitrary" (44).

Craig concludes by explaining that he finds his approach to faith and reason both liberating for Christians and effective in evangelism:

> It is tremendously liberating to be able to know that our faith is true and to commend it as such to an unbeliever without being dependent upon the vagaries of argument and evidence for the assurance that our faith is true; at the same time we know confidently and without embarrassment that our faith is true and that the unbeliever can know this, too, without our falling into relativistic subjectivism. . . . Success in witnessing is simply communicating Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit and leaving the results to God. Similarly, effectiveness in apologetics is presenting cogent and persuasive arguments for the Gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit, and leaving the results to God (49, 50).

Although Geisler believes that rational arguments for the truth of God's existence can be had, he agrees that such apologetic arguments cannot produce faith. "Rational arguments offer proof but do not necessarily persuade unbelievers of God's existence. They may be objectively correct but not always subjectively convincing. This is because they are directed at the mind but are not directive of the will. They can 'lead the horse to water,' but only the Holy Spirit can persuade a person to drink."[16]

The Foundation of Theology

Generally speaking, classical apologists understand the purpose of apologetics to be showing the rationality of the foundational truths and principles on which Christian theology is based. As Ronald B. Mayers has explained, this meant that apologetics was often virtually equated with theological prolegomena, notably in Thomism. Mayers himself rejects this equation. He argues that **theological prolegomena** is a branch of theology that "assumes the truth of the Christian faith" and seeks to clarify its underlying assumptions, while apologetics seeks "to demonstrate the *truthfulness* of Christianity and the viability of the theologian's assumptions."[17] One can see, though, that even in Mayers's view there is a very close relationship between the two disciplines.

Warfield has articulated the classical understanding of the purpose of apologetics as justification of the grounds of theology perhaps more explicitly than anyone:

> It is, in other words, the function of apologetics to investigate, explicate, and establish the grounds on which a theology—a science, or systematized knowledge of God—is possible; and on the basis of which every science which has God for its object must rest, if it be a true science which claims to a place within the circle of the sciences. It necessarily takes its place, therefore, at the head of the departments of theological science and finds its task in the establishment of the validity of that knowledge of God which forms the subject-matter of these departments. . . .[18]

Warfield insists that apologetics must be distinguished from apologies and even from the science of apology. The place to study "the theory of apology" and "to teach men how to defend Christianity" is "in practical theology" alongside homiletics and similar disciplines. The science of apology "of course presupposes the complete development of Christianity through the exegetical, historical and systematic disciplines," and as such should be treated along with

polemics and the like as a theological discipline, either systematic or practical.[19] But apologetics is a theoretical discipline that seeks to establish the reality of the subject matter with which all theology, including the study of apology, is concerned. "So soon as it is agreed that theology is a scientific discipline and has as its subject-matter the knowledge of God, we must recognize that it must begin by establishing the reality as objective facts of the data upon which it is based."[20]

Insofar as the unbeliever is invited to examine the apologetic argument for the truth of the fundamental claims and principles of Christian theology, this view of apologetics has generally been associated with a high view of human reason even after the Fall. Classical apologists do subscribe to the biblical doctrine of the Fall and the resulting effects of sin on human thinking, but they generally argue that human depravity cannot have completely debilitated the capacity of human reason to understand God's truth. Man is in need of the grace of God to respond to special revelation, but he is capable of understanding general revelation to a considerable extent and can formulate rational arguments to prove the existence of God. Moreover, the non-Christian is capable of understanding that such rational arguments cannot enable him to know God personally, much less savingly, and therefore to recognize that special, redeeming revelation from God is needed.

The crucial point here is that for the classical apologist, theology is a discipline to which people are invited *after* becoming Christians. Thus he seeks to keep theological questions of controversy among Christians on the back burner in apologetic arguments directed to non-Christians. C. S. Lewis was typical of many classical apologists in that he understood the task of apologetics to be defending the basic message of "mere Christianity" and not arguing for one theological or denominational tradition within Christianity. "Our divisions should never be discussed except in the presence of those who have already come to believe that there is one God

and that Jesus Christ is His only Son."[21] Lewis acknowledged that the theological issues that divide Christians may be important, but the apologist as such should not be concerned to press one viewpoint on those issues: "Each of us has his individual emphasis: each holds, in addition to the Faith, many opinions which seem to him to be consistent with it and true and important. And so perhaps they are. But as apologists it is not our business to defend *them*. We are defending Christianity, not 'my religion.'"[22]

The Constructive Use of Philosophy

Norman Geisler's thinking has been greatly influenced by the work of Aquinas, and his apologetic system reflects a modified version of Thomistic philosophy. Thus he believes that Christian theology is not inimical to philosophy but can be expressed within the context of a metaphysical system. In their textbook on philosophy Geisler and co-author Paul Feinberg assert that "philosophy serves in the construction of the Christian system and in the refutation of contrary views" (73).[23] They quote with approval C. S. Lewis's statement that "good philosophy must exist, if for no other reason, because bad philosophy needs to be answered" (74).[24] Philosophy is the necessary prerequisite to systematic theology and to apologetics, because both require "the philosophical tools of clear, consistent, and correct thinking" (76). Apologetics "involves the construction of good arguments or the supplying of good evidence in justification of the basic truth of Christianity. . . . This task falls squarely on the shoulders of philosophy." Philosophy is also necessary to the task of polemics and to the effort of communicating the Christian worldview. Geisler does not believe that the "glasses" of one's non-Christian worldview are cemented to one's face and can be removed only by a supernatural conversion,

but he does acknowledge that people view things according to the models or paradigms they have embraced. “One task of Christian philosophy, then, is to work on a pre-evangelistic level to get the outsider to look around the edges or through the cracks of his glasses, or to take them off and try a set of ‘theistic glasses’ on for size. Philosophy performs the process indicated by these metaphors through philosophical argumentation” (78).

Stuart Hackett, an evangelical philosopher whose students included William Lane Craig, identified philosophy with apologetics perhaps as forcefully as anyone has. Hackett notes that philosophy deals with such questions as the possibility of knowledge (epistemology), the ultimate nature of reality (metaphysics), and our proper conduct in the light of reality (ethics). He then suggests that apologetics also seeks to defend a particular set of answers to these questions. “In this broad sense, apologetics is practically coextensive with the whole philosophical enterprise: it is not merely a defense—it is rather a defense of conclusions which the rational analysis of human experience fully justifies.”[25]

The importance of philosophy to classical apologetics is emphatically affirmed in J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig’s textbook, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*.[26] “One of the awesome tasks of Christian philosophers is to help turn the contemporary intellectual tide in such a way as to foster a sociocultural milieu in which Christian faith can be regarded as an intellectually credible option for thinking men and women” (2). Of all the disciplines in the university curriculum, philosophy “is the most foundational of the disciplines, since it examines the presuppositions and ramifications of every discipline at the university—including itself!” (3). Philosophy is important for Christians, first of all, as “an aid in the task of apologetics” (14). “When an objection against Christianity comes from some discipline of study, that objection almost always involves the use of philosophy” (15).

Christianity Consistent with Science

Classical apologists generally try to maintain a balanced view of science, neither uncritically endorsing it nor hypercritically rejecting it. They believe apologists should seek to show that Christianity is consistent with the scientific facts, and that this usually, though not always, includes comparing what Christianity says about the world and mankind with what current scientific theorists have concluded. But scientists can be wrong, and the way science is applied by both scientists and nonscientists often leads to error. This means that Christians should be cautious about endorsing current scientific theory too uncritically, as theories change. B. B. Warfield issued a warning to that effect: "Science, philosophy, scholarship, represent not stable but constantly changing entities. And nothing is more certain than that the theology which is in close harmony with the science, philosophy, and scholarship of today will be much out of harmony with the science, philosophy, and scholarship of tomorrow."[27]

Such caution is typical of classical apologetics. One must indeed use the most current findings by scholars and scientists, but at the same time their findings are not to be accepted uncritically. This point appears repeatedly in the writings of C. S. Lewis. For example, he observed:

> Science is in continual change and we must try to keep abreast of *it*. For the same reason, we must be very cautious of snatching at any scientific theory which, for the moment, seems to be in our favour. We may *mention* such things; but we must mention them lightly and without claiming that they are more than "interesting." Sentences beginning "Science has now proved" should be avoided. If we try to base our apologetic on some

> recent development in science, we shall usually find that just as we have put the finishing touches to our argument science has changed its mind and quietly withdrawn the theory we have been using as our foundation stone.[28]

This does not mean that we may not appeal to scientific evidence for Christian truth claims, merely that we must present this evidence with due caution. Lewis examplifies the approach he here recommends in another place when he applies modern scientific theories about the beginning of the universe to the cosmological argument:

> If anything emerges clearly from modern physics, it is that nature is not everlasting. The universe had a beginning, and will have an end. But the great materialistic systems of the past all believed in the eternity, and thence in the self-existence of matter. . . . This fundamental ground for materialism has now been withdrawn. We should not lean too heavily on this, for scientific theories change. But at the moment it appears that the burden of proof rests, not on us, but on those who deny that nature has some cause beyond herself.[29]

The sum of the matter is that Lewis is confident scientific breakthroughs will not change the situation radically with respect to the scientific credibility of Christianity. They may lend some support to the Christian faith, but one must be careful not to exaggerate this support naively. In any case, science will not disprove Christian teachings.

> Each new discovery, even every new theory, is held at first to have the most wide-reaching theological and philosophical consequences. It is seized by unbelievers as the basis for a new attack on Christianity; it is often, and more embarrassingly, seized by injudicious believers as the basis for a new defence.

> But usually, when the popular hubbub has subsided and the novelty has been chewed over by real theologians, real scientists and real philosophers, both sides find themselves pretty much where they were before. So it was with Copernican astronomy, with Darwinism, with Biblical Criticism, with the new psychology.[30]

Norman Geisler, while finding much value in the scientific evidence for the creation and design of the universe and for the creation of life and of mankind, is likewise cautious about overstating the case. "Since science is limited and progressive, we should not expect complete agreement in every detail with the biblical presentation. However, the amount of present agreement is striking."[31] He warns that "scientific evidence by its nature does not yield full proof of things, except on a very limited, material level in some controlled situations." He concludes that "one must temper dogmatism about scientific arguments. Perhaps it is simply sufficient to say that the prevailing view in the scientific community presents evidence that strongly supports what Christians have always believed on biblical (and some even on philosophical) grounds. . . ."[32]

On the basis of this stance toward science, evangelical apologists during the hundred years following the publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* tended to give cautious, qualified acceptance of the theory of evolution while rejecting naturalistic evolutionism as a philosophical dogma rather than a scientific theory. So conservative a theologian and apologist as B. B. Warfield accepted the theory of evolution and argued that it could be reconciled with Scripture. Yet Warfield was critical of Darwinism as a philosophy, and wrote articles specifically on Darwin and the religious implications of his work.[33]

While C. S. Lewis was not opposed to the scientific theory of evolution, which deals with change within limits, he took issue with what he called the myth of popular evolutionism. "To

the biologist Evolution is a hypothesis. It covers more of the facts than any other hypothesis at present on the market and is therefore to be accepted unless, or until, some new supposal can be shown to cover still more facts with even fewer assumptions. . . . In the Myth, however, there is nothing hypothetical about it: it is basic fact: or, to speak more strictly, such distinctions do not exist on the mythical level at all." Lewis puts his finger on the humanistic, philosophical belief of evolutionism when he concludes: "In the science, Evolution is a theory about *changes:* in the Myth it is a fact about *improvements*."[34]

Although Lewis has been enormously popular among evangelicals, most evangelical apologists since his time have not followed him in accepting theistic evolution. Since about 1960, evangelical apologists have tended to reject theistic evolution as a serious option and have instead argued for some form of creationism. Classical apologists, though, have generally expressed a greater degree of openness to other modern scientific theories. These include the belief that the universe is billions of years old instead of the thousands of years posited by young-earth creationists. Both Geisler and Craig have endorsed the old-earth view, though Geisler more tentatively than Craig.[35]

J. P. Moreland has for many years engaged in the most sophisticated analysis by any classical apologist of the nature of science and of its relation to Christian theological truths. He has, in fact, written an entire book and numerous articles on the subject.[36] The burden of Moreland's extensive research and writing on science and Christianity may be summed up under four headings.

First, he argues against naturalism and especially scientism that science can legitimately be practiced within the framework of a theistic worldview. *Scientism*, or what philosopher of science John Kekes calls "scientific imperialism," is the belief that science alone yields genuine

knowledge or truth. Moreland argues that scientism is self-refuting because the claim that science alone produces truth is not learned scientifically.[37] He documents extensively the various sorts of limits to science that preclude any sort of scientism.[38] The refutation of scientism and its presupposed worldview of naturalism opens the door to theism as a proper worldview context in which science may be practiced.

Second, Moreland urges caution in assuming a naively realist view of science. Although he thinks "a scientific theory should be understood along realist lines in the absence of sufficient evidence to the contrary," he cautions that in some instances we should be reticent to grant that a scientific theory describes reality as it actually is.[39] If the theory attempts to explain in totality phenomena that lie outside the proper domain of science, or if it conflicts with a rationally well established conclusion about reality, then the theory should be viewed as a construct that does not describe reality itself.[40] This "eclectic" approach to scientific theories gives methodological rigor to the classical apologists' characteristically cautious acceptance of scientific theories and developments.

Third, Moreland explores the various models for relating science and theology and explains why the two fields should be viewed as overlapping. Over against those who would "protect" religion or faith from science by relegating theology to the realm of values or spiritual matters, he insists that theology does deal with some aspects of the physical world (such as its creation by God). Thus "science and theology really do interact on common ground,"[41] and effort must be made to reconcile or integrate science and theology.[42]

Fourth, Moreland argues that creationism can be a legitimate idea within the discipline of science. His main contention here is that science should not be defined in such a way as to exclude creationism *a priori* from the discipline of science. For example, he argues that the

definition of science affirmed in Judge William R. Overton's 1981 decision in the Little Rock creationism trial assumed both naturalism (the belief that nature is all that exists) and a naive view of the nature of science.[43] He concludes that other arguments designed to prove that creationism cannot be science (regardless of the evidence!) misunderstand the nature of creationism as well as assume an erroneous view of science.[44] He has also argued that a careful study of Genesis and of the biological facts shows that creationism, at least of a generic form, is reconcilable with the physical evidence as well as consistent with Scripture.[45] Although he shows an openness to young-earth creationist arguments, Moreland appears to lean toward an old-earth position, freely drawing on modern cosmology for evidence of the beginning and intelligent design of the universe.[46]

Moreland's approach to science well illustrates the central method of classical apologetics. His objections to scientism and naturalism, as well as to definitions of science that exclude creationism, focus on the question-begging and self-defeating nature of these positions.

Revelation Confirmed in History

According to classical apologists, history is important to apologetics because it is in history that God has revealed himself. As Warfield explained, Christianity is not a religion of "ideas," that is, of timeless, "eternal verities," but is rather "a religion of fact."

> A God who is only an idea, and who never intervenes in the world of fact, can never actually save a soul that is real from sin that is real. For the actual salvation of an actual sin-stricken soul we require an actual Redeemer who has actually intervened in the actual course of history. . . . Christianity is a historical religion, all of whose doctrines are facts.

> He who assaults the trustworthiness of the record of the intervention of God for the redemption of the world, is simply assaulting the heart of Christianity.[47]

To show that Christianity is rational, then, it is necessary to show that God has revealed himself in history—specifically as recorded in Scripture. But logically, before that can be shown, one must know that it is possible for God to have revealed himself to us in history. At this point the modern apologist confronts the question of whether historical knowledge is even possible. The notion of historical relativism has been around for a while, but it has gained fresh strength in the wake of postmodernism and its dictum that all knowledge, including historical knowledge, is relative and subjective. Moreover, even if the possibility of historical knowledge is admitted, many skeptics argue that we cannot have such knowledge of alleged miracles.

In his *Christian Apologetics*, Geisler addresses the supposed subjectivity of historical knowledge by arguing that scientific knowledge is conceded to be possible despite the subjective dimensions of the scientific enterprise. He admits that "no human historian can be objective" if this is defined to mean possessing absolute knowledge. But historians can have an objective view of the past if this is understood to mean "a *fair but revisable* presentation." In this sense, "it can be argued that history can be just as objective as some sciences" (290).[48] The very fact that we are able to distinguish "between propaganda and history" proves that history is not "entirely in the mind of the beholder" (291).

Geisler denies that "facts speak for themselves" if this is taken to mean "that facts bear only *one* meaning and that they bear it evidently." He agrees that "there are no so-called bare facts," but insists that the meaning that facts bear is assigned to them by minds and does not emanate from the facts themselves (291).

> Finite minds may give differing interpretations of them or an infinite Mind may give an absolute interpretation of them, but there is no one objective interpretation a finite mind can give them. Of course, if there is an absolute Mind from whose vantage point the facts are given absolute or ultimate meaning, then there is an objective interpretation of the facts which all finite minds should concur is the ultimate meaning. If theism is the correct world view . . . then there is an objective meaning to all facts in the world. All facts are theistic facts, and no nontheistic way of interpreting them is objective or true. (292)[49]

For Geisler, then, the objectivity of all knowledge of facts, including knowledge of history, rests on the truth of the theistic worldview. If God exists, then all facts are what they are because God says so, and we have true or objective knowledge insofar as we accept the meaning of the facts as given by God. Arguments for the theistic worldview, then, come logically prior to arguments about historical fact, since our objective knowledge of those facts depends on our considering them within the context of the correct worldview.

Likewise, Geisler argues that the fact that historians inevitably make selective use of materials to construct their interpretations of the past does not make objectivity impossible, but it does make it important that events be seen in the right context. Ultimately this means that the *meaning* of events cannot be interpreted "without assuming an overall hypothesis or world view by which the events are interpreted" (293). "Hence, the problem of objective meaning of history, like the problem of objective meaning in science, is dependent on one's Weltanschauung [worldview]" (294). For the classical apologist, the truth of the theistic worldview can and should be established prior to considering the historical facts pertaining to Christianity, making objective knowledge of those facts possible.

Proof from Experience

Classical apologists do not build their case for theism primarily on religious experience. However, they recognize that the Christian faith does not call people merely to believe that God exists, but rather to experience a personal relationship with God. The biblical concept of God is not only infinite and transcendent but also personal and immanent. The Christian faith is based on revelation from this infinite-personal God, and there can be no awareness of a revelation that is not experienced. Thus, if theism is to be defended as more than an academic theory, it is necessary to defend the validity and rationality of religious experience. For this reason classical apologists take pains to argue that it is rational to believe that people can have experiences of God and that these experiences can result in an immediate knowledge of God.

In Part One of *Philosophy of Religion*, Norman Geisler and Winfried Corduan offer three main arguments in defense of religious experience. First, *religious experience is unique*—it differs radically from moral or aesthetic types of experience. Moral experience, for example, unlike religious experience, cannot overcome failure and guilt. Aesthetic experience may produce wonder and admiration but not worship and adoration (18-24).[50]

Second, *the religious impulse, if not religious experience per se, is universal*. Classical apologists contend that the universality of religious experience across centuries and cultures points to a basic human drive toward self-transcendence. Even those who claim not to be religious betray their desire for the transcendent. Geisler and Corduan observe that “humans are incurably religious. When one way to transcend is cut off, people find another. . . . The sacred or secular history of humanity supports the thesis that by nature a person has an irresistible urge to transcend himself” (61).

Classical Christian apologists affirm that to be real, this transcendental urge must be more than a subjective projection or wish fulfillment; it must have an objective and independent basis in something real. The universality of this need, illustrated by such diverse thinkers as Freud, Schleiermacher, Heidegger, Tillich, Sartre, Beckett, Kafka, Nietzsche, Hume, and Kant, is itself proof for many classical apologists that the transcendent exists. They maintain that the premise that "what human beings really need really exists" is based on the experience of human expectations and the potentiality for all human needs to be met (74). "Some people may think that needs are real but cannot be fulfilled; few people (if any) will really believe it, and no person can consistently live with that belief" (75). Skeptics may deny that the human need for transcendence can be fulfilled, but no one can live consistently with the logical implications of a universe devoid of the divine (no ultimate meaning, purpose, value). Even atheists generally admit the human need to transcend, though they allow no object to fulfill this need.

Third, *religious experience is too ubiquitous to be explained away*. Geisler and Corduan reason that the evidential value of religious experience could only be discounted by making the radical claim that every person in the history of the world who claimed to have a religious experience has been totally deceived. Since this would be an onerous claim to prove, the conclusion that some reality exists that corresponds to the universal need for transcendence stands. Thus there must be a basis in reality for at least some religious experience. "For if even one religious person is right about the reality of the Transcendent, then there really is a Transcendent. It seems much more likely that such self-analyzing and self-critical men as Augustine, Blaise Pascal, and Kierkegaard were not totally deceived than that total skepticism is right" (76).

In his debates with atheists, William Lane Craig routinely ends his opening statements by affirming that human beings can not only know about God's existence but can also know God by experience. However, he cautions, "This isn't really an *argument* for God's existence. Rather, it's the claim that you can know that God exists wholly apart from arguments, simply by immediately experiencing Him…. For those who listen, God becomes an immediate reality in their lives."[51] His purpose in citing the experience of God, then, is not "to hold forth my experience as evidence to others of God's existence, but to invite others" to experience God.[52]

For Further Study

Geisler, Norman L., and J. Kerby Anderson. *Origin Science: A Proposal for the Creation-Evolution Controversy*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987. Geisler's major contribution to a Christian view of science.

Geisler, Norman L., and Ronald M. Brooks. *Come, Let Us Reason: An Introduction to Logical Thinking*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990. A textbook on logic, with numerous illustrations of the application of deductive reasoning in apologetics and theology.

Hoffecker, W. Andrew. *Piety and the Princeton Theologians: Archibald Alexander, Charles Hodge, and Benjamin Warfield*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981. Explores the view of spiritual experience taken by Old Princeton.

Moreland, J. P. *Christianity and the Nature of Science: A Philosophical Investigation*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989. In-depth discussion of a Christian view of science by a classical apologist with training in science (see also Moreland, *Scaling the Secular City*, 185-223).

_____. *Love Your God with All Your Mind: The Role of Reason in the Life of the Soul*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1997. On the importance of developing a Christian mind for personal growth, evangelism, apologetics, and worship.

_____, and William Lane Craig. *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2003. Two leading classical apologists team together in a massive textbook treating the nature of philosophy, epistemology, philosophy of science, and other subjects relevant to apologetics.

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[1]Geisler, *Christian Apologetics,* 29-46.

[2]Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, 428.

[3]Warfield, "Apologetics,"in *Studies in Theology*, 8-9.

[4]Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apoloogetics*, 427.

[5]Warfield, "Apologetics," in *Studies in Theology*, 15; so also "Introduction to Francis R. Beattie's *Apologetics*," in *Shorter Writings*, 2:99; "A Review of *De Zekerheid des Geloofs*," in *Shorter Writings*, 2:114 (where the word *not* has been accidentally omitted!).

[6]Warfield, "The Deity of Christ," in *Shorter Writings*, 1:152.

[7]Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*, 133-36, 141-45.

[8]Ibid., 43.

[9]See below, chapter 6, for details on Geisler's cosmological argument.

[10]For examples of this line of reasoning, see Winfried Corduan, *No Doubt about It: The Case for Christianity* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997), 36-38; Paul Copan, *"True for You, but Not for Me": Deflating the Slogans that Leave Christians Speechless* (Minneapolis: Bethany House,

1998), 23-25. We used this same argument in *An Unchanging Faith in a Changing World: Understanding and Responding to Issues that Christians Face Today* (Nashville: Nelson, Oliver, 1997), 54-57.

[11]C. S. Lewis, "On Obstinacy in Belief," in *The World's Last Night and Other Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1960), 18.

[12]Ibid., 20, 21.

[13]William Lane Craig, in Craig and Crossan, *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up*, 160.

[14]All parenthetical references in this section are from Craig's *Reasonable Faith*. Craig gives a very similar exposition of his approach in his essay, "Classical Apologetics," in *Five Views on Apologetics*, ed. Cowan, 26-55.

[15]As Craig observes in an endnote, the term comes from Edward John Carnell, but Craig applies the concept to apologetics in a way that differs from Carnell's approach (326 n. 24).

[16]Norman Geisler, *Knowing the Truth about Creation: How It Happened and What It Means for Us* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Servant, 1989), 79.

[17]Mayers, *Balanced Apologetics*, 7-8.

[18]Warfield, "Apologetics," in *Studies in Theology*, 4.

[19]Ibid., 5.

[20]Ibid., 7.

[21]Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 6; see 6-9.

[22]Lewis, "Christian Apologetics," in *God in the Dock*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 90.

[23]All parenthetical references in this paragraph are to Norman L. Geisler and Paul D. Feinberg, *Introduction to Philosophy: A Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980).

[24]Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949; New York: Collier, 1980), 50.

[25]Stuart C. Hackett, *The Resurrection of Theism: Prolegomena to Christian Apology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), 20.

[26]J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2003). Parenthetical references in this paragraph are to this book.

[27]B. B. Warfield, "Christianity and Our Times," in *Shorter Writings*, 1:49.

[28]Lewis, "Christian Apologetics," in *God in the Dock*, 100-101.

[29]Lewis, "Dogma and the Universe," in *God in the Dock,* 39.

[30]Lewis, "Religion and Rocketry," in *World's Last Night*, 84.

[31]Geisler, *Knowing the Truth about Creation*, 110.

[32]Ibid., 96, 97.

[33]See, for example, B. B. Warfield, "Charles Darwin's Religious Life: A Sketch in Spiritual Biography," in *Studies in Theology*, 541-82; "Darwin's Arguments against Christianity and against Religion," in *Shorter Writings*, 2:132-41. For a collection of his writings pertaining to science arranged in chronological order, see B. B. Warfield, *Evolution, Science and Scripture: Selected Writings*, ed. Mark A. Noll and David N. Livingstone (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000). Cf. David N. Livingstone, *Darwin's Forgotten Defenders: The Encounter between Evangelical Theology and Evolutionary Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Edinburgh: Scottish

Academic Press, 1987); W. Brian Aucker, "Hodge and Warfield on Evolution," *Presbyterion* 20 (1994): 131-42.

[34]Lewis, "The Funeral of a Great Myth," in *Christian Reflections,* ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 85.

[35]Geisler, *Knowing the Truth about Creation*, 96-97, cf. 153-54. Craig's treatment of the age of the universe is discussed in chapter 6.

[36]See especially J. P. Moreland, "Kuhn's Epistemology: A Paradigm Afloat," *Bulletin of the Evangelical Philosophical Society* 4 (1981): 33-60; "The Scientific Realism Debate and the Role of Philosophy in Integration," *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society* 10 (1987): 38-49; *Scaling the Secular City: A Defense of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 185-223; *Christianity and the Nature of Science* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989); "Theistic Science and Methodological Naturalism," in *The Creation Hypothesis: Scientific Evidence for an Intelligent Designer*, ed. J. P. Moreland (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1994), 41-66; "Science, Miracles, Agency Theory, and the God-of-the-Gaps," in *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History*, ed. R. Douglas Geivett and Gary R. Habermas (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1997), 132-48; and Part IV, "Philosophy of Science," in Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 305-90. In places in his writings Moreland refers to himself as an evidentialist, but this is always in a broader sense of an apologist who uses "rational argumentation and evidence . . . as epistemic support for Christian theism" (Moreland, *Christianity and the Nature of Science*, 205 n. 42). Moreland's approach borrows from evidentialism in the narrower sense of the term (as we use it in this book), but in general seems fairly classified as a classical approach.

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[37]Moreland, *Christianity and the Nature of Science*, 103-108; *Scaling the Secular City*, 197; Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 347-48.

[38]*Christianity and the Nature of Science*, 103-138; *Scaling the Secular City*, 198-200; *Philosophical Foundations*, 348-50.

[39]*Christianity and the Nature of Science*, 205-206.

[40]Ibid., 206-211; see also *Philosophical Foundations*, 326-45.

[41]*Christianity and the Nature of Science*, 13.

[42]*Scaling the Secular City*, 200-208; *Philosophical Foundations*, 350-52.

[43]*Christianity and the Nature of Science*, 23-35; *Scaling the Secular City*, 208-213.

[44]*Christianity and the Nature of Science*, 221-34.

[45]*Scaling the Secular City*, 214-23.

[46]Ibid., 33-41, 52-55.

[47]Warfield, "How to Get Rid of Christianity," in *Shorter Writings*, 1:59.

[48]Parenthetical references are to Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*.

[49]This material is repeated—some of it verbatim—and augmented in "Appendix Two: Do Historical Facts Speak for Themselves?" in Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume One: Introduction, Bible*, 585-89.

[50]Parenthetical references in this section are to Geisler and Corduan, *Philosophy of Religion*.

[51]William Lane Craig, in *The Craig—Flew Debate*, ed. Wallace, 23, 24.

[52]Ibid., 179.